

CHAPTER 2

A PORTRAIT OF HENRY BATE

(Carlos Steel and Steven Vanden Broecke)

2.1. Introduction

Building on the example of Emile Littré (1801-1881), Aleksander Birkenmajer (1890-1967) identified the *Nativitas* as the single most important source for Bate's biography before 1280-81.¹² One can readily understand why: in this unique text, one finds Bate obsessively searching for reliable evidence of the precise time of his birth, of other important events in his life, in order to confirm the predictions based on his nativity chart. Bate's self-analysis sought to triangulate the evidence of historical events, the "supercelestial disposition" signified in his natal chart, and "the teachings of the philosophers".¹³ Convinced that his nativity chart never failed to reveal the life story into which he was born, Bate provided his readers with an unusual amount of biographical and personal detail. The following biography thoroughly exploits the information found in the *Nativitas*, while supplementing it with data from both archival sources and his other works.¹⁴

2.2. Bate's biography

2.2.1. Family background

Bate was born in the city of Mechelen on Saturday the 24th of March 1246, shortly after midnight, after a pregnancy that was hardly noticeable to his mother's acquaintances.¹⁵ Both of his parents died before 1280,¹⁶ although Bate considered them to have had a rather long life.¹⁷ Friendship between Bate and his parents was signified in the former's nativity.¹⁸ There were at least four children in the Bate household, of which Henry Bate was the second youngest.¹⁹ There was one older brother, whose nativity Henry Bate cast as well.²⁰ His older sister was born on the 11th of November, 1244.²¹ We know nothing about Henry's younger sibling.

Bate was clearly from a well-to-do patrician family. In 1259, a "Henricus dictus Bate" —probably his father or uncle— is mentioned as one of the landlords of Grim-

¹² Birkenmajer 1970, p. 109.

¹³ *Nat.* 345-346.

¹⁴ See also Wallerand 1931, pp. 7-13.

¹⁵ *Nat.* 72-73; *Nat.* 237.

¹⁶ *Nat.* 33-34; *Nat.* 1529-1530.

¹⁷ *Nat.* 690-691.

¹⁸ *Nat.* 1533, 1537.

¹⁹ *Nat.* 1516.

²⁰ *Nat.* 1529-1530.

²¹ *Nat.* 53-55.

bergen abbey.²² Nicolas Bate, who was either Bate's brother or nephew, is regularly mentioned as dean of the St. Rumbold's chapter in Mechelen between 1290 and 1297.²³ The wife of his maternal uncle used the death of Walter IV Berthout, member of a long line of noble overlords of Mechelen, on 10 April 1244, as her private chronological reference point for the birth of Bate's older sister.²⁴ As we shall see, there is also evidence that Walter V Berthout intervened on Bate's behalf to obtain an ecclesiastical prebend.

2.2.2. *Studies in Paris*

This family background allowed Bate to move to Paris for his studies. In the colophons of his works, Bate typically refers to himself as *magister* (see below, chapter 3), which indicates that he obtained at least a master's degree from the Paris arts faculty. According to the university statutes, Bate could not have started his studies there before the age of fourteen (i.e. before 1260), nor could he have obtained a master's degree before the age of twenty (i.e., 1266). As for the end of Bate's Parisian studies, we are certain that Bate completed them before 1273, when we find him back in Mechelen, ready for an ecclesiastical career.

One further piece of evidence might allow us to push our *terminus ante quem* further back, to 1271 or so. As we will see below, Bate called Guy of Avesnes (c. 1253-1317), bishop of Utrecht between 1301 and 1317, his former disciple (*discipulus*) in philosophy. Guy of Avesnes fully embraced an ecclesiastical career between 1271 (around which time he became a canon of St. Lambert in Liège) and 1281 (when he became sacristan of St. Lambert and archdeacon of Hainaut). If we assume that Bate tutored Guy in philosophy prior to this career (i.e., around the age of 18), and if we assume that this happened after Bate's return from Paris, then we could plausibly date Bate's return to c. 1271.

Yet another possibility is that Guy himself studied at Paris (which he could have done, under the aforementioned statutes, by c. 1267), and that his 'discipleship' in fact refers to some form of being tutored by Bate while studying at the arts faculty. One problem with this scenario is that we have no that evidence Guy of Avesnes studied in Paris. Another problem is the language of a master-pupil relationship which Bate adopted towards Guy: this seems to imply a deeper intellectual *rapport* than could be expected from mere university tutoring. All things considered, it

²² Archief Abdij Grimbergen, MS Cl. 1,9 (dd. 7 February 1259): "Henrico dicto Bate, tanquam domino fundi". See Guldentops 2001, vol. 1, p. 4.

²³ See Jamees 1991, p. 176 (doc. 225, dd. 6 July 1290); p. 180 (doc. 228, dd. 7 June 1291); p. 206 (doc. 260, dd. 6 December 1295); p. 227 (doc. 285, dd. 18 October 1297). See Guldentops 2001, vol. 1, pp. 4-5.

²⁴ On the Berthouts, see Croenen 2003. On the correct year of Walter IV Berthout's death, see *ibidem*, p. 312 note 3. Croenen situates Walter IV's death in 1243, criticizing Emmanuel Poulle's suggestion that Bate's testimony about the epitaph data for Walter IV's death refers to 1244 (n.s.). After weighing the arguments of Croenen against the evidence of Bate's interpretation of the chronology surrounding Walter IV's death, we decided to retain Poulle's interpretation.

seems safe to suggest that Bate obtained his Parisian master's degree between 1266 and c. 1271.

The *Nativitas* repeatedly suggests that Bate was well acquainted with medical science.²⁵ External confirmation is offered by *De diebus creticis*, in which Bate examined the astronomical conditions, in particular of the moon, for the development of certain diseases (see below, section 3.1). Bate's interest in medicine is equally apparent in parts VIII-X of his encyclopedic *Speculum divinatorum*, where Bate refers to an impressive range of medical authorities. One might suppose, then, that he also attended classes in medicine as a student in Paris. The claim that he went on to study theology is unsubstantiated and perhaps even implausible, as he never shows any sustained interest in theological topics.²⁶

Little is known about Bate's intellectual circle in Paris, but it seems very likely that he was connected to a thriving local community of celestial practitioners, which comprised, amongst others, Peter of Limoges, who was dean of the faculty of medicine between 1267 and 1270 (see below, section 5.3.2), and William of Saint-Cloud (1285-1292).²⁷ In the aforementioned *Speculum divinatorum* (XVIII.15), Bate gives a detailed description of the passage of a comet between June and October 1264.²⁸ However, further research on contemporary observations of this comet will be necessary before we can securely establish whether Bate's description was based on personal observation, and whether it allows us to place him in Paris in 1264.

Pierre d'Ailly (1350/51-1420), Simon de Phares and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola all refer to Bate as a pupil of Albertus Magnus (1200-1280). This is implausible, given that Albert left Paris for Germany in 1254; the connection was probably made on the basis of Albert's reputation as an astrological authority. Still, the *Speculum divinatorum* reveals that Bate was influenced by Albert's views on the intellect, and that he can be considered as the first representative of a tradition of thought later labeled as 'Albertism'.²⁹ Bate certainly came to know Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who taught in Paris between 1268 and 1272. The *Speculum divinatorum* is replete with long quotations of Thomas's works, mostly his commentaries on Aristotle. Bate calls him the "novus expositor" and often confronts Thomas with the ancient commentator, Averroes. Very often, however, Bate criticizes Thomas's Aristotelian views, particularly on the intellectual soul and its capacity to know intelligible objects, and defends a more Platonic view instead. Occasional remarks suggest a measure of envy towards the famous master.³⁰ The discussion on the intellectual soul in *Specu-*

²⁵ *Nat.* 2518-2519; *Nat.* 2535. For other references to Bate and medicine in the *Speculum*, see Van der Lugt 2004. For the strong sociological and disciplinary connection between medicine and the sciences of the stars until the 16th century, see Westman 1980.

²⁶ Birkenmajer 1970, p. 4; Wallerand 1931, p. 9.

²⁷ Wallerand 1931, p. 9.

²⁸ On this comet, see Kronk 1999-2017, vol. 1, pp. 218-222.

²⁹ Guldentops 2001a.

³⁰ On Bate and Thomas, see Wallerand 1934 and Guldentops 2005.

lum divinorum (III.17 and V.14) also shows Bate to have been well acquainted with the views of his compatriot Siger of Brabant (1240-1282), whom Aquinas attacked in his *De unitate intellectus* (1270).³¹ Although Bate's studies were probably completed by c. 1271, he returned to Paris after his studies, since the *Nativitas* places him there in the autumn of 1280.³²

2.2.3. *Return to the Low Countries: courtly connections, astrology, and an ecclesiastical career*

In another passage of the *Nativitas*, Bate qualifies himself as a philosophy teacher and princely secretary³³, a function which we know he fulfilled for the aforementioned Guy of Avesnes, brother of John II of Avesnes, who was the count of Hainaut (1247-1304).³⁴ In fact, Bate dedicates his *Speculum* to Guy, addressing the bishop as follows:

"To Lord Guy, brother of the count of Hainaut and Holland, bishop of the church of Utrecht by God's grace, who is now our reverend father, but previously was the son or pupil of philosophical doctrine and our beloved disciple; Henry of Mechelen, who is called Bate in the vernacular (meaning progress in Latin), cantor of the church of Liege, wishes him a blessed life burning of love for true and perfect Sophia, that is, uncreated and created wisdom. May he measure his active life with unfailing prudence, so that speculative wisdom may always rise above it and the best part never be taken away".³⁵

Even taking into account rhetorical emphasis, there can be no doubt that Bate and his disciple continued to have a close relationship throughout their lives.

The *Nativitas* tells us that Bate obtained his first ecclesiastical prebend in his 28th year (i.e. in 1273).³⁶ The colophons of four translations of works of Ibn Ezra (see below, section 3.2) show that he was residing in his native Mechelen at that time. This suggests that the benefice was tied to the local church of St. Rumbold. Bate's first ecclesiastical advancement coincided with his initial ventures in astrological authorship. In 1273, four astrological treatises by Abraham Ibn Ezra were translated into French in his house in Mechelen, in a joint venture with "Hagins le Juif" (i.e., Chajjim, responsible for translating from Hebrew into French) and a certain Obert de Montdidier (who wrote down Hagins's oral translation).³⁷ There may have been more translations, as is clear from other references in the *Nativitas*. Bate may have become acquainted with Hagins in Paris. In 1278, Bate made a translation of *De*

³¹ See Nardi 1945, pp. 175-177.

³² *Nat.* 44.

³³ Tutorship: *Nat.* 2507-2508. Secretary: *Nat.* 1129-1130; *Nat.* 2522.

³⁴ On this topic, see Van de Vyver 1960, pp. xiv-xv.

³⁵ Van de Vyver 1960, p. 3:1-11.

³⁶ *Nat.* 280-281.

³⁷ Wallerand 1931, p. 14.

iudiciis revolutionum annorum mundi, a treatise attributed to al-Kindi, “ad preces Iohannis de Milana” (see below, section 3.2.1). Thanks to a legal document made in Mechelen on February 1259, we can identify the commissioner of this translation as John of Milanen, alderman of Mechelen and possibly Bate’s uncle.³⁸

In 1274, Bate participated in the council of Lyons (7 March-17 July), where he established a solid friendship with the famous translator William of Moerbeke OP, whose translation of Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* was used by Bate throughout the *Nativitas*.³⁹ It was to Moerbeke that Bate addressed his treatise on the astrolabe, in a letter from Mechelen dated 11 October 1274.⁴⁰ It was also in Mechelen that Bate composed his treatise on the equatorium and his own astronomical tables, the *Tabulae Machlinienses*.⁴¹

One may wonder why Henry, who was not a bishop, was invited to attend the council of Lyons. A possible explanation may lie in his connections with the court of the count of Hainaut. Among the decisions taken by the council was the deposition of the prince-bishop of Liège, Henry III of Guelders (d. 1285). One of the candidates for Henry III’s succession was John of Enghien (d. 1281), a bishop of Tournai with good connections at the court of Pope Gregory X (1271-1276). John of Enghien most probably attended the council in Lyons to promote his (successful) bid for the Liège position; if this was so, he may have been assisted by the young Henry Bate, since Bate played a similar role when promoting the candidacy of Guy of Avesnes in Orvieto in 1292 (see below, section 2.4). After all, the Enghien and Avesnes families were closely related: the mother of John of Enghien was a cousin of count John of Avesnes, brother of Bate’s pupil Guy of Avesnes.

As we learn again from the *Nativitas*, Bate received a second, “fatter” ecclesiastical benefice,⁴² apparently involving “various disturbances and difficulties”,⁴³ near the end of May 1276⁴⁴, when Bate was in his 31st year.⁴⁵ Gaston Wallerand and others have suggested that it was this second benefice that brought him to the cathedral chapter of St. Lambert in Liège.⁴⁶ The fact that John of Enghien was bishop of Liège probably played a role in this appointment. The earliest explicit evidence connecting Bate to Liège comes from the colophon of his translation of Abraham Ibn Ezra’s *‘Olam I [De mundo vel seculo]* of 1281, which states that he began the translation

³⁸ See Goetschalckx 1907, p. 318, nr. 444: “Vniversis presentes litteras visuris Everardus de Ralenbeca, Iohannes de Milana, Walterus de Stadiken, Scabini Machlienses”. Also see below, note 68.

³⁹ Wallerand 1931, p. 11.

⁴⁰ On the nature of Bate’s friendship with Moerbeke, see Guldentops 2001, vol. 1, pp. 6-7 n 32.

⁴¹ Poulle 2008; Poulle 1964; d’Alverny and Poulle 1956.

⁴² *Nat.* 286.

⁴³ *Nat.* 314-315, 318; also see *Nat.* 1017-1023.

⁴⁴ *Nat.* 290.

⁴⁵ *Nat.* 309-310.

⁴⁶ Wallerand 1931, p. 11; Renardy 1981, p. 291; Guldentops 2001, vol. 1, p. 7.

in Liège, presumably sometime around 1279/80, but finished it in Mechelen.⁴⁷ Bate apparently kept his residence in Mechelen.

Bate candidly admitted the importance of worldly connections to his career. The *Nativitas* tells us that he obtained his first two benefices (i.e., in 1273 and 1276) through the aid of the same⁴⁸ “illustrious martial prince”⁴⁹, and mentions that he obtained many goods from women as well.⁵⁰ Although the identity of these patrons remains unclear, there is evidence suggesting that Bate’s “illustrious prince” was in fact the powerful Walter V Berthout (d. after 1286)⁵¹, who also intervened to help Bate obtain the third and most important benefice (in 1281).

Berthout was married to a niece of Henry II, duke of Brabant (1207-1248), and thus closely related to the court.⁵² In the absence of the duke, Berthout even took on the role of regent of Brabant for a while. On the other hand, Berthout also acted as ‘advocatus ecclesiae’, expected to defend the privileges of the church of Liège in Mechelen. In actual fact, Berthout was more interested in establishing his own seigneurial position in Mechelen, and got into armed conflict with prince-bishop Henry III of Guelders.⁵³ Relations improved during John of Enghien’s tenure at Liège (1274-1281).⁵⁴ It is around this time that Berthout may have intervened on behalf of Bate.

As for Bate’s reference to the role of female patrons, a fascinating glimpse of these connections is offered by the alternative, retrospective version of Bate’s astrological analysis for his 35th year in *S*.⁵⁵ In this version, Bate recounts negotiations concerning a new (his third?) benefice, which happened in the year beginning on 24 March 1280:

“In the beginning of this year, after three days or so, he whose revolution is cast here, hastened himself to a monastery of nuns in Brabant along with the lord of his lands. Having found there a relative and counsellor of the queen of France, the lord pleaded with her, imploring her as if she was obliged, not to renege on her promise about the promotion of this servant of God [i.e., Bate], which she herself had steadfastly approved”.⁵⁶

Near the end of his *versio altera*, Bate reports the outcome of these negotiations:

“Around the middle of February [1281], a man from Huy came forth with great insistence on behalf of some nephew to the king to make contact with him. Although

⁴⁷ Wallerand 1931, p. 16 note 16; Sela 2010, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Nat.* 286-287.

⁴⁹ *Nat.* 289.

⁵⁰ *Nat.* 1773-1774.

⁵¹ On Walter V Berthout, see Croenen 2003, pp. 325-331.

⁵² Croenen 2003, p. 53.

⁵³ Croenen 2003, pp. 99, 102.

⁵⁴ Croenen 2003, p. 100.

⁵⁵ See above, section 1.2.2.2, and below, *App. I*.

⁵⁶ *App. I* 2-9.

there had already been talk about the same matter around the feast of St. Nicholas [i.e., 6 December 1280], I had little hope about its outcome, although (as it later transpired) this nobleman had a firm plan, long conceived from the innermost benevolence of friendship. For it is incumbent upon friends to finally give a suitable response to an urgent request by delaying it. Moreover, on 2 March [1281], which was Torch Sunday, around the twelfth hour of the day, this man had a conversation with the queen's counsellor, as had happened at the beginning of the year, and another conversation concerning this promotion was had on the following Thursday, around the third or fourth hour. Although this lady was initially backtracking on certain points, having convened a meeting, she promised anew that she would loyally aim to realize her promise. And then after three days the 35th year was completed".⁵⁷

Which monastery might this be? And who was the *consiliaria* whom Bate's friends targeted there throughout the year? One tentative answer can be developed through the reference to the queen of France. In 1281, this was Mary of Brabant (1254-1322), daughter to Henry III, duke of Brabant (c. 1231-1261) and second wife of the French king Philip III (1245-1285). Assuming that the Brabant monastery which Bate visited in 1281 had a special relation with Mary, we might consider the Dominican monastery of Val Duchesse (Hertoginnedal) in Auderghem, near Brussels, as a likely option. Val Duchesse was founded in 1262 by Mary's mother, Aleidis of Brabant (1233-1273), and Mary of Brabant is mentioned several times, between 1275 and 1293, in charters related to Val Duchesse.⁵⁸

Who was Mary's "familiar counsellor" ("familiaris consiliaria")? Only four 13th-century members of the Val Duchesse community have been identified with certainty, among whom only the prioresses might seem to qualify for this type of relation to the queen of France.⁵⁹ In 1281, this prioress was Aleidis of Burgundy, niece of the founder Aleidis of Brabant. An alternative possibility, however, is indicated by the text of a donation made to Val Duchesse in 1293. In this charter, the donor Beatrice of Jodoigne is explicitly identified as maid of honour to Mary of Brabant ("damoysselle a ... madamme Mary, reyne de Franche").⁶⁰ One could surmise that Beatrice of Jodoigne was related to the aforementioned John of Enghien, then prince-bishop of Liège, and that it was she who intervened on Bate's behalf.

This third benefice, so difficult to obtain in 1281, must have been the position of "cantor" at the cathedral chapter in Liège. The cantor was the second in dignity after the dean of the chapter, and a fat prebend was usually attached to such a position. The first solid proof of Bate holding this position dates from 1289, when he is mentioned as cantor and canon of St. Lambert cathedral, acting on the authority

⁵⁷ *App. I* 86-100.

⁵⁸ Information kindly supplied by Godfried Croenen.

⁵⁹ See Bogaerts 1979, pp. 144 and 234.

⁶⁰ A copy of this charter is preserved in Algemeen Rijksarchief Brussel, Kerkelijke archieven Brabant, nr. 11465, fol. 91r. See Uyttebrouck and Graffart 1979, p. 52, nr. 51. We thank Godfried Croenen for bringing this document to our attention.

of the cathedral chapter in a legal dispute with prince-bishop John of Flanders (1282-1292).⁶¹ This shows that Bate already enjoyed great authority in Liège at that time. We also find this title in the colophons of his translations of Ibn Ezra, made in Orvieto (see below, section 3.2). In the aforementioned dedication letter of the *Speculum* too, Bate presents himself as “Leodiensis ecclesie cantor”.

2.2.4. *After the Nativitas*

Since the *Nativitas* was composed in 1280-81, information for the later period of Bate's life is relatively scarce. Early in 1292, Bate accompanied Guy of Avesnes to Orvieto to assist him in defending his interests at the papal court. The occasion was a dispute about the succession to the episcopal see of Liège, which Guy was now hoping to obtain following the death of prince-bishop John II of Dampierre (1282-1292).⁶² Pope Nicholas IV (1288-1292) died on 4 April, not long after their arrival; discussion about the election of a new pope was drawn out and only Bate stayed on, probably to keep an eye on his patron's interests. Bate benefited from this prolonged stay to complete his translations of astrological works by Abraham Ibn Ezra.⁶³ The last of these translations was dated 29 October 1292.

It was also in Orvieto that Bate came to know Adam, bishop of Aversa, to whom he dedicated his translation of *De luminaribus* in 1292.⁶⁴ Adam, a native of Picardie and former “rector ecclesie de Bray” (Braye-sur-Somme), is mentioned in the *Registri* of Charles I of Anjou (1226/7-1285) as “consiliarius et medicus regis”. With the support of this royal patron, Adam became bishop of Aversa at the end of 1276, holding this position until his death in 1293. Adam probably stayed in Orvieto for some time, as did many members of the curia, during the prolonged conclave after the death of Nicholas IV. It is there that he may have become acquainted with Henry Bate, with whom he could converse in Picardian on matters of common interest.

⁶¹ Wallerand 1931, p. 11. Renardy 1981, p. 291 situates Bate's first Liège prebend in May 1276, his preceptorship of Guy of Avesnes in 1281, and his Liège cantorship on 6 April 1289.

⁶² Wallerand 1931, pp. 12-13; Van de Vyver 1960, pp. xiv-xvi.

⁶³ Wallerand 1931, pp. 16-7.

⁶⁴ See the colophon of the translation of *De luminaribus*, below, section 3.2, with the dedication to “reverendo patre domino N presulo Aversano”. “N” as found in the MS of Limoges is certainly an error for “A” (as is found in the colophon of the Glasgow MS). In fact, between 1276 and 1293, Adam of Bray was bishop of Aversa (see Birkenmajer 1970, p. 108). Filangieri di Candida 1950-2000 gives several references to Adam de Aversa. Most of these relate to disputes about property and the payment of tithes. See vol. 18 (1277-78), n. 405: “pater A. Adversanus episcopus, dilectus consiliarius et familiaris noster”; vol. 19 (1277-78), n. 15: “consiliarius et medicus regis”; vol. 21 (1278-79), n. 46: “Adam rector ecclesie de Bray”; vol. 25 (1280-82), n. 52: “Adam episcopus Aversanus familiaris et consiliarius regis”; vol. 27 (1283-85), n. 13: “Adam episcopus Aversanus consiliarius et familiaris”. Adam remained as bishop active as “medicus”. In vol. 23 (1279-1280), n. 126 and 152, Adam is mentioned as member of a committee to examine a candidate bachelor in medicine. Vol. 19 (1277-78), n. 390 is also interesting. It is an order of the king to his treasurer asking him to make a copy of a book to be sent -without delay- to the bishop “transcribendum per eum ad opus suum accommodare per quinternum sine difficultate procurētis”. We owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Pasquale Arfé (Naples), who provided copies of all relevant pages in the *Registri*.

Given Adam's interest in medical matters, it is possible that Bate also composed his *De diebus creticis* for him (see below, section 3.1).

After returning to the Low Countries, Bate probably went back to residing in Mechelen rather than Liège, where Hugh of Chalon (1260-1312) became prince-bishop in 1296. At the end of his life, Bate devoted himself to the writing of a philosophical encyclopedia called the *Speculum divinatorum*, dedicated to Guy of Avesnes, who had, in the meantime, become bishop of Utrecht in 1301.⁶⁵ From the dedicatory letter, it appears that Bate remained in close relations with his former noble pupil: Bate claims to have composed the *Speculum* upon Guy's request.

The work was completed between 1301 and c. 1305.⁶⁶ However, Bate must have started working on this monumental project much earlier, collecting materials as early as his Paris student years. It is also clear that Bate had an extraordinarily rich collection of scientific and philosophical works. Some references in the *Speculum* indicate that Bate resided in Mechelen while was working on the last volumes. In part XIX, he recounts stories about strange events happening in Leuven and Relegem, a small village close to Brussels. In an addition to the *Speculum*, Bate tells a story about ghostly appearances occurring in Berlaar, a village close to Mechelen, in 1305-6.⁶⁷

His presence in Mechelen is again attested in a legal document from 1308.⁶⁸ Another biographical reference from that year is found in an addition to part XXII, chapter 18, which Bate wrote some years after the *Speculum* was completed. In this addition, Bate refers to a solar eclipse he observed on 31 January 1310 [i.e., 1309].⁶⁹ According to Bate, this eclipse confirms the astronomical tables he had composed and corrected "tertio et ultimo" (*add.* 44).

"Still, our own tables, which have been corrected by taking ancient and modern observations into account, insofar as this was possible for us while assuming the principles of astronomy, are found to agree with the appearances much more than do the other tables. This has been clearly ascertained and observed, through sense perception, from a solar eclipse on the last day of January 1309. In the middle of the [visibility of] that eclipse, a kind of circle of solar radiance appeared, shining equally all around the Moon through the intermediate transparency of a quite pervious cloud. Finally, our aforementioned tables should not at all be despised. For by means

⁶⁵ It has been generally accepted that the title of Bate's magnum opus is *Speculum divinatorum et quorundam naturalium*. However, Guldentops (2002, pp. 395-396) convincingly argued that *Speculum divinatorum* is the original title of the work.

⁶⁶ Poulle 2008; Van de Vyver 1960, pp. xiv-xv.

⁶⁷ Guldentops 1997.

⁶⁸ Guldentops 1997; Guldentops 2001, vol. 1, p. 8 (with reference to Erens 1950, pp. 174-175; nr. 401 dd. 13 August 1308). This document (along with Erens 1950, nr. 402) shows that Bate inherited a property on the Nieuwe Bruul in Mechelen from the aforementioned John of Milanen, who was perhaps his uncle.

⁶⁹ Bate himself dates the eclipse to 1309, following the calendar convention of starting the new year on Easter: see *Nat.* 40-42.

of these [tables], which are harmonized with the observations done previously by Ptolemy and later by us and which agree with truthful experience, it is possible to find the places of the planets and their conjunctions, as well as the revolutions of the year and its seasons; I mean at least those conjunctions about which it is primarily worthwhile or necessary to have some certitude without the vain effort of searching out the proportional longer or nearer longitudes, in which, as we have said, [the hypothesis of] eccentricity is brought in".⁷⁰

This is Bate's astronomical testament, written when he was in his sixties. He clearly took great pride in his astronomical tables, considering them superior to other tables. Yet we also sense some disappointment concerning their reception ("demum neque spernandae sunt omnino"). The text also demonstrates his ongoing interest in the sciences of the stars; as late as 1298, Bate was receiving astronomical eclipse reports from Paris (see below, section 5.3.3). His ongoing interest in the effects of the visible heavens on human life is also evident from many sections in the part XIX of the *Speculum*, which covers extraordinary natural phenomena.⁷¹

Bate may have spent his last years at the abbey of Tongerlo.⁷² He is mentioned in three necrologia: those of the abbey of Tongerlo, of the abbey of St. Bernard in Hemiksem, and of the cathedral chapter of Liège. Unfortunately, only the day of Bate's death is mentioned (resp. as October 20, 21, and 25) — not the year.⁷³ More research is required to determine the subsequent fate of Bate's extraordinary library.

2.3. Bate's self-portrait

Born in spring, Bate found his appearance agreeable due to the dominance of humid and hot qualities in his complexion. Healthy, white in color⁷⁴, Bate claimed to enjoy good eyes, height, and bodily bearing.⁷⁵ The Moon's disposition and an ascendant in Sagittarius⁷⁶ signified a rotund face, upright posture, almost converging brows and swift motions, despite certain Saturnine influences.⁷⁷ The only clear blot on Bate's virile constitution⁷⁸ were some nutritional difficulties brought on by the Moon's oppositional aspect to the ascendant degree of Bate's nativity.⁷⁹

⁷⁰ See Steel and Guldentops 1996, p. 347-348 (*Additio*, 51-66), translation by Guy Guldentops, modified.

⁷¹ See the discussion in *Speculum*, pars XIX, c. 10: "de generatione portentorum seu monstrorum ad finem aliquam a cura diuina per uirtutem celestem causatorum secundum astrologorum iudicia et exempla", which contains long quotations from Haly Abenrager.

⁷² According to Sanderus 1659, pp. 21-22, Bate was friends with abbot Godfrey of Herentals and stayed in the abbaye at 1309.

⁷³ Guldentops 2001, p. 8.

⁷⁴ *Nat.* 817.

⁷⁵ *Nat.* 780-782.

⁷⁶ *Nat.* 821-824.

⁷⁷ *Nat.* 816-820.

⁷⁸ *Nat.* 810.

⁷⁹ *Nat.* 785-786.

Despite this positive outlook, Bate's *Nativitas* often reads as the narrative of someone in worryingly ill health. In order to verify his birth time through the astrological technique of primary directions, Bate was able to draw on his experience of several grave illnesses. At 21 and 24, he suffered from serious bouts of *disinteria*.⁸⁰ At the age of 30, Bate was struck by a dangerous disease of the eyes⁸¹, followed by "a rather harmful abscess on the upper jaw and throat, accompanied by a feverish heat" as he reached the age of 35.⁸²

The aforementioned *versio altera* (see *App. I* and above, section 1.2.2.2) offers a more detailed account of Bate's health in his 35th year. Around Easter 1280, Bate's swelling of the throat returned. The summer brought him severe headaches of which physicians could not determine the cause, while an abscess on the left nostril spread to his entire jaw, causing an inflammation of the left eye. In the autumn of 1280, Bate was constipated while suffering from a constant ringing in his head, aggravated by bouts of vertigo. A conjunction of Mercury with Mars and Saturn made it difficult for him to speak and, some three days before Christmas, gave him pain in the left side of his tongue. Around the same time, Bate experienced a loosening of the tonsils and another eye disease. These were successfully treated with regimen and diet. Finally, the winter of 1280/1 brought fever, two light abscesses of the left nostril, while the ringing in Bate's ears persisted. On the positive side, his eyes were momentarily fine, while his constipation relaxed by the following spring.

According to Bate, most mercurial properties and conditions had been impressed on him. In Albumasar's *Introductorium maius*, he found that this led him towards "probable inductions, necessary syllogisms, the study of philosophy, poetry, as well as medicine, several mathematical arts such as arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, as well as music, poetry, and dance".⁸³ In each of these sciences, he felt particularly drawn towards practical use and application,⁸⁴ novel inventions and the comprehension of secret things.⁸⁵ After Easter 1280, Bate was surrounded by rumors of his engagement with the dark arts.⁸⁶ Bate also admitted to having frequent dreams of flying.⁸⁷

It has been pointed out that music played a substantial role in Bate's life, both as cantor at Liège cathedral and in his philosophical *Speculum*.⁸⁸ Bate's *Nativitas* strongly confirms this:

⁸⁰ *Nat.* 242-243; *Nat.* 263-264.

⁸¹ *Nat.* 269-270.

⁸² *Nat.* 324-325.

⁸³ *Nat.* 1150-1155; *Nat.* 2241.

⁸⁴ *Nat.* 1179-1180.

⁸⁵ *Nat.* 1154-1155; *Nat.* 1194-1195.

⁸⁶ *App. I* 12-24.

⁸⁷ *Nat.* 2273.

⁸⁸ On Bate and music, see: Goldine 1964, Page 1986, pp. 59-61, Jeffreys 2009, 90-91, Silan 2008. We are grateful for the advice of Prof. David Burn (KU Leuven, Dept. of Musicology) in translating these passages.

"From childhood, this servant of God gladly listened to people playing on flutes and pipes and to every kind of musical instrument, finding so much pleasure in them that he acquired a share in almost every one of these arts. He knew how to modulate air through pipes, flutes and diverse kinds of reeds, and also how to elicit melodic tunes with organs and strings by striking keys.

This man knew how to carry the melodious fiddle, handling the touch of its snares and the drawing of the bow in due proportion, how to skilfully touch the citola with fingers and plectrum. Using a double feather, he knew how to bring out in harmony pleasant melodies from the sweet-sounding psaltery, and how to replicate the delightful sound of the Lycian trumpet by playing the tympan with beats replicated in turn. Moreover, he mastered every kind of singing and diverse kinds of popular songs in various languages, and was himself fond of singing. He was a merry inventor of poems and songs, a playful and delightful leader of dances, a master of outdoor dances who enjoyed preparing plays, feasts and jokes, initiating playful dance in company".⁸⁹

By his own admission, Bate lost interest in flute playing when he decided to study philosophy and became more obedient to the intellect.⁹⁰ He refers to what Aristotle recounts about Athena in his *Politics* (VIII 7): "she threw away the flute, because its practice did not contribute to knowledge". Nevertheless, he found consolation in the same Aristotle praising a moderate practice of music in a well-educated young man. Interestingly, we find Bate composing a vernacular song on his misfortunes in the summer of 1280.⁹¹

Another frequent source of pleasures and tensions was Bate's professed weakness for women, including young girls.⁹² Bate's analysis of the fifth house confirmed these inclinations, which ran counter to the philosopher's traditional *persona*.⁹³ Most embarrassing for Bate was the fact that his nativity chart clearly predicted that he should become legally married; an impossibility in view of his clerical status. Bate found a satisfactory solution:

"Even if we grant that the configuration of the signifying stars predict that this person should become legally married, it does not necessarily follow that he should go under the female yoke. For as Ptolemy says in his *Centiloquium*: when one knows the nature of the stars, one can avert many of their influences".⁹⁴

Nevertheless, venereal matters were marked out as a frequent source of adversity and tribulation.⁹⁵ Bate's subsequent discussion of the events of his 35th year appear

⁸⁹ *Nat.* 1308-1320. For other references to Bate's singing, see *Nat.* 1701-1702; *Nat.* 2497.

⁹⁰ *Nat.* 1292-1295; *Nat.* 1327-1328.

⁹¹ *App.* I 33-35.

⁹² *Nat.* 1791-1792.

⁹³ *Nat.* 1011-1012.

⁹⁴ *Nat.* 1866-1872.

⁹⁵ *Nat.* 1678-1680.

to confirm this. In the summer of 1280, female relations led Bate to become the object of much gossip. This problem recurred around 10 November 1280, when Venus was conjoined with Mars in Scorpio. At this point, Bate once again claimed his innocence and victimization by “a woman who had been misled and deceived in a fraudulent manner”.⁹⁶ Bate preferred to be discreet about his affairs, on his own account for fear of becoming prolix and because of his natural desire for secrecy.⁹⁷ His self-analysis betrays a clear tendency towards censorship concerning astrological significations with overly explicit sexual implications.⁹⁸

Despite Bate’s talents as an extraverted *bon vivant*, he also confessed to a measure of loneliness in his social environment, where he claimed to have many friends but few confidants.⁹⁹ Indeed, the *Nativitas* contains several references to “detractors and jealous people”, possibly occasioned by Bate’s steady rise in ecclesiastical and courtly *milieux*.¹⁰⁰ Beyond these worldly contingencies, however, Bate suggested a “sadness” inside of himself,¹⁰¹ which he counteracted by privileging that “noble love of the sciences, *trivium*, moral philosophy, and the others, as well as the three theoretical philosophical disciplines of mathematics, natural philosophy, and theology”.¹⁰²

As was customary in the analysis of astrological nativities, Bate commented at length on his manner and time of death. Concerning the latter topic, he remained surprisingly vague, determining a life expectancy of some 80 years.¹⁰³ Although Bate’s analysis eventually suggested a gentle death between family and friends,¹⁰⁴ he still considered it necessary to take specific precautions against the possibility of dying abroad or from a fall, especially while horse riding.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁶ *App.* I 51-52.

⁹⁷ *Nat.* 1299-1303; on Bate’s tendency to secrecy, see also *Nat.* 1863-1866 and *Speculum*, XIX, 24 (the latter has the same reference to *Albumasar in Sadan*).

⁹⁸ Notable examples include: Bate’s omission of the passus “ueretrum eius et testiculi longi” when quoting Ibn Ezra in *Nat.* 821-825; omission of the passus “in coitu et in vestimentorum ornatu et in unguentorum unctione” when quoting Albumasar in *Nat.* 2862-2865; omission of the passus “et multiplicabitur coitus eius” and “diuersis vestibus delectabitur” when quoting Albumasar in *Nat.* 2868-2873.

⁹⁹ *Nat.* 1356-1357.

¹⁰⁰ *Nat.* 1934-1950; *Nat.* 2180-2189.

¹⁰¹ *Nat.* 1372-1373.

¹⁰² *Nat.* 1365-1368.

¹⁰³ *Nat.* 712-725.

¹⁰⁴ *Nat.* 2702-2703.

¹⁰⁵ *Nat.* 2708-2709; *Nat.* 2732.